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RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1416
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 8849
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1574
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 9535
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 000024

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR AND BRITISH HIGH COMMISSION MET WITH
SHEIKH HASINA REGARDING MILITARY COUP

Classified By: Ambassador Patricia A. Butenis; reason 1.4(d)

11. (C) The Ambassador and British High Commissioner Anwar Chowdhury met with Awami League President Sheikh Hasina on January 6. They apprised her of approaches made to them by prominent Awami League (AL) members, supposedly backed by a faction within the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), advocating political scenarios which include forcing Hasina and arch-rival Khaleda Zia into exile abroad and possible military intervention. The Ambassador and British High Commissioner stressed they did not support or encourage these proposals and had consistently opposed any unconstitutional role for the military but felt obligated to bring these reports to Hasina's attention. They suggested that bold action by the two leaders to break the impasse would put an end to such speculation. The Ambassador and British High Commissioner will meet with BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia January 7 for the same purpose.

12. (C) Hasina largely dismissed the reports and even joked that exile in the United States would allow her to see her granddaughter. She expressed little concern over her personal security. Hasina was not troubled by military involvement, either directly or under a state of emergency. If the military can intervene and "make things okay," that would be good, she said. The Ambassador queried Hasina why she thought the military would be willing to return power to the very politicians who created the need for military intervention in the first place. Hasina said she did envision marshal law; opining that no officer is strong enough to lead a coup. Moreover, she was confident the people would not allow the military to retain power longer than necessary to resolve the political crisis. "There would be violence, bloodshed, the country could collapse," if the military refused to step down.

13. (C) Hasina argued that the current political impasse was the direct result of an orchestrated BNP plan, implemented with the collusion of the Chief Advisor, to create conditions to force the AL and its partners in the "Grand Alliance" to boycott the election. "The BNP does not want us to participate because we will win," she declared with confidence. She complained that President/Chief Advisor, Dr. Iajuddin Ahmed does not listen to his advisors or the international community, but simply follows BNP instructions. The President, she said, just wants to hold elections and hand over power to Zia, leaving the Awami League and its alliance partners with no alternative but to boycott a "rigged" election.

14. (C) Asked how she would respond if Zia reached out to

her to find a solution, Hasina said she would reject any such overtures from Zia. The two envoys described a possible scenario suggested by some in the BNP under which elections would be held with the understanding that new elections would be called within 12 months. Hasina dismissed the proposal out-of-hand, saying she would sooner support a solution involving the military than one that returned the BNP to power. Emphasizing the need to take a hard line now, Hasina said her supporters already blame her for initially accepting Iajuddin's decision to appoint himself the Chief Advisor. Many argue that continuing the street violence that forced former Chief Justice Hasan to refuse appointment as the Chief Advisor, would have been better than allowing the Iajuddin to engineer a biased election. She denied that cancellation of former president and Jatiya party leader Ershad's nominations caused her to boycott the election.

¶5. (C) The Ambassador raised the possibility of UN mediation, noting Hasina had once sought UN assistance. (Note: Hasina wrote to the UN Secretary General in December asking for UN monitoring of the election. End note.) Hasina expressed some interest in a UN mediated election, but it was clear she envisioned an election effectively run by the UN and not just UN mediation of the political issues separating the two major political alliances.

¶6. (C) On reconstitution of the Caretaker Government and the Election Commission, Hasina insisted Iajuddin must relinquish his position as Chief Advisor; the original ten advisors, however, would be acceptable. Hasina also insisted the Election Commission must be reconstituted: Aziz and Zachariah (both currently "on leave") must resign.

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¶7. (C) Comment: Rumors have been rampant for months about a possible military solution -- ranging from simple military support for the Caretaker Government or a military role under a constitutional state of emergency to extra-constitutional proposals for a military-backed national unity government or an outright coup. The Embassy has consistently stressed both publicly and privately that we would oppose any unconstitutional move by the military and that even a state of emergency should be avoided if at all possible. Embassy contacts within the military continue to insist that a coup is not in the cards and the actions of the military will remain within constitutional bounds. End comment.
BUTENIS